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AUTHOR Strickland, James F.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine: (1) preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching as a career, and (2) differences in perceptions among groups of preservice teachers categorized on the basis of a variety of background variables. Subjects of the study were 101 education majors enrolled in a college in the Southeast. The survey instrument included 71 controlled-choice items divided into three areas: background information; factors viewed as encouraging or discouraging in relation to teaching as a career and individuals perceived as potential sources of encouragement for students interested in teaching; and qualities perceived as important for effective teachers. Some major findings included: (1) encouraging factors related to teaching were job availability and security, fringe benefits, working conditions, and a contribution to humanity; (2) salary was perceived as discouraging; (3) teaching was viewed as a good profession for both men and women (and especially for women); (4) encouragement to become a teacher came from family and teachers; (5) participants would encourage others to enter teaching; (6) almost half of the subjects were interested in elementary level teaching but very few planned to teach in the middle school; and (7) qualities of good teachers were perceived as clarity of thought, enjoyment of teaching, and knowledge of subjects taught. Specific findings of the study are identified in seven tables. (JD)

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF
TEACHING AS A CAREER

James F. Strickland
Georgia Southern College

Jane A. Page
Georgia Southern College

Fred M. Page, Jr.
Georgia Southern College

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Over the past five years, the education reform movement in America has received widespread attention. While the initial reforms have been taking place, the possibility of a teacher-shortage has evolved from a topic of conversation to a critical reality. In order to ameliorate the effects of the shortage, teacher educators and others are intensifying their efforts to attract and retain more and abler individuals for the teaching profession. Those who are planning and implementing recruitment efforts are seeking further insights into the perceptions of various groups concerning teaching as a career.

Current estimates of the demand for teachers indicate that between 1986 and 1992, the nation will need 1.3 million new teachers.¹ Meeting a demand of this magnitude will require replacing almost half of the current teaching force. The expected supply of teachers is considerably less than the number needed. As early as 1987, 171,000 new teachers will be needed by public and private schools as instructors retire and leave their jobs. Only 142,000 new teaching graduates will be available.² According to some school officials, the forces of the marketplace are already at work and will cause many of the nonteaching, credentialed individuals to return to the classroom. There appears to be little evidence, however, to support this claim. In a recent study, 83 percent of the former teachers polled said they were unlikely to return to teaching, while the remaining 17 percent said they might.³

Undoubtedly, the demand for new teachers will create intense pressure on school systems to get "warm bodies" into the classroom at the risk of sacrificing quality. At least one national commission has warned against this danger and has stressed that since standards must not be lowered, incentives will have to be raised. Another source has cautioned against repeating some of the mistakes of the past: "If, this time around, we settle for any warm body who will teach,

we will be in grave trouble for two reasons. First, college-educated men and women have a much wider range of careers open to them than ever before, so the pool of able college graduates available for teaching careers at the prevailing salaries is much smaller than it was in the past. Second, the highly technical nature of the world economy makes it imperative that we produce high school graduates who are far better educated than ever before. The performance of the entire elementary and secondary system of schooling must be radically upgraded at the very time that we are experiencing a severe shortage of teachers." ⁵

Some of the frequently-cited disincentives for entering the teaching profession are: inadequate salaries, limited advancement opportunities, stressful work environments, and lack of status and autonomy. Not only are these factors associated with teachers leaving the profession, but also with many of the best students being discouraged from ever considering teaching as a career.⁶ As detrimental as these factors may be, the existence of inaccurate perceptions can further damage recruitment efforts. For example, a recent study comparing the perceptions of education majors and engineering majors found that both groups underestimated the mean salaries of teachers in 3 of 4 categories. The education majors underestimated the actual mean salary for beginning teachers in their own state by 10 percent and for all U.S. teachers by 13 percent.⁷ Most of the engineering students who had once seriously considered teaching reported that low salary was the primary reason that they did not pursue the education degree. One of the implications of the study is that teacher educators should deal more assertively and less hesitantly with issues of compensation.

The set of circumstances presented above indicate that one of the greatest challenges in the current reform movement is to significantly increase the supply of teachers without losing the gains which are being made in the quality of teachers.

Progress toward meeting the challenge can be made by determining those factors which preservice teachers rate as encouraging or discouraging about teaching, as well as those qualities which they associate with effective classroom teachers. The information gained in this study, based on a survey of students who have chosen and are persisting in an education major, can be of significant value to policy-makers, teacher recruiters, and teacher educators.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the study was two-fold: (1) to determine preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching as a career, and (2) to determine differences in perceptions among groups of preservice teachers categorized on the basis of a variety of background variables. The background variables were: (1) sex, (2) whether or not anyone had ever encouragingly talked with the student about becoming a teacher, (3) whether or not the student has relatives who have served as teachers, (4) age at which the student became interested in teaching, (5) grade level student plans to teach, and (6) plans following undergraduate graduation.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The study consisted of 101 preservice teachers enrolled in a single college within the Southeast. All subjects had chosen a major in education and were enrolled in education courses containing a laboratory component.

Subjects responded to a survey instrument developed by the researchers to ascertain preservice teachers' perceptions of teaching as a career. Organization of the instrument includes 71 controlled-choice items divided into three areas of questions. One area relates to background information. A second area asks respondents to rate nine factors as encouraging or discouraging, in relation to teaching as a career opportunity. Further, the second area includes items to determine categories of individuals who are perceived by the respondents as potential sources of encouragement for students interested in teaching. In the third area,

subjects are asked to rate the importance of 19 different qualities for effective classroom teachers.

Responses of subjects were analyzed using frequency tabulations and one-way analyses of variance.

RESULTS

Specific findings of the study are identified in Tables I through VII. Some of the major findings of the study include:

1. Factors related to teaching most often perceived as encouraging were: contribution to humanity, job availability, job security, fringe benefits, and working conditions.
2. The factor related to teaching that was most often perceived as discouraging was salary.
3. Teaching was viewed as a good profession for men and women (especially for women).
4. Men viewed teaching as significantly more positive for men to enter than did women.
5. Individuals viewed as "encouragers" by 80 percent or more of the respondents include: college teachers, elementary principals, elementary teachers, family members, and high school principals.
6. Participants in the study would encourage interested friends and family members to enter the teaching profession.
7. Someone has talked encouragingly with 91.8 percent of the respondents. Those who have talked most often include family members, friends, college teachers, and high school teachers.
8. Most of the individuals became interested in teaching during high school or college. However, a growing number are becoming interested later in life and returning to school as non-traditional students.
9. Almost half of the subjects expressed interest in teaching elementary grades; only 12.5 percent indicated plans to teach in the middle school.
10. Several qualities of good teachers were consistently rated higher than others: explain subjects clearly, enjoy teaching, and are knowledgeable in subjects taught.

11. Calculation of analysis of variance identified a number of significant differences:
- a. nine differences between males and females existed; generally, females attached more importance to certain qualities exhibited by good teachers.
 - b. eight differences were identified between groups categorized on the basis of grade level; elementary teachers rated several qualities of good teachers as more important;
 - c. three differences were identified between groups categorized on the basis of whether or not relatives of theirs had served in education.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

The concept of teacher-shortage has evolved from an interesting conversational topic to stark reality. Results of this study may be beneficial as consideration focuses on amelioration of problems which contribute to shortages.

As has been the case in numerous surveys, salary was viewed as a discouraging factor. Throughout the nation, significant salary increases are beginning to occur. For the shortage to be effectively dealt with though, steps in the right direction may be too late; leaps may be the only deterring agent.

Along with the general teacher shortage, the middle school area may be hit particularly hard since few respondents indicated an interest in working with children of this age. Recruitment strategies to deal with this particular deficit must be structured.

The target population of potential teacher education students should be carefully considered. Some students make their decision at an early age, ten years and younger. On the other hand, individuals beyond the typical college age make decisions to prepare for teaching. How can this range of students best be informed about teaching as a career opportunity?

The continued positive contributions of the teaching profession to our society are contingent upon the availability of an adequate supply of teachers. Equipped with supporting data, such as information from this study, educators can initiate activities that will be beneficial in increasing the availability of teachers.

TABLE I
PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING
 (Numbers Identified Represent Percentages)

1. Encouraging and discouraging factors

	Very Encouraging	Somewhat Encouraging	Somewhat Discouraging	Very Discouraging
a. contribution to humanity	74.0	24.0	2.0	0
b. fringe benefits	22.0	60.0	16.0	2.0
c. job availability	41.5	53.5	5.0	0
d. job security	36.6	58.4	5.0	0
e. salary	2.0	35.6	51.3	10.9
f. societal status	10.0	59.0	28.0	3.0
g. student discipline	5.0	50.5	41.5	3.0
h. testing and evaluation of teachers	5.0	47.5	35.6	11.9
i. working conditions	16.0	67.0	16.0	1.0

2. Do you think teaching is a good profession

- a. for men to enter? Yes = 85.1 No = 14.9
 b. for women to enter? Yes = 99.0 No = 1.0

3. Having shown an interest in becoming a teacher, do you feel that the individuals listed below would encourage you?

- | | | |
|---------------------------|------------|-----------|
| a. college teachers | yes = 93.1 | no = 6.9 |
| b. elementary principals | yes = 85.7 | no = 14.3 |
| c. elementary teachers | yes = 83.7 | no = 16.3 |
| d. family members | yes = 85.0 | no = 15.0 |
| e. friends | yes = 67.0 | no = 33.0 |
| f. high school counselors | yes = 79.6 | no = 20.4 |
| g. high school principals | yes = 82.7 | no = 17.3 |
| h. high school teachers | yes = 78.9 | no = 21.1 |

4. If a friend of yours expressed an interest in teaching, would you encourage that person to become a teacher?

yes = 97
 no = 3

5. If you had a brother and he expressed an interest in teaching, would you encourage him to become a teacher?

yes = 85.1
 no = 14.9

TABLE I
(Continued)

-
6. If you had a sister and she expressed an interest in teaching, would you encourage her to become a teacher?

yes = 96

no = 4

7. How much do you think teachers enjoy their work?

All of the time = 5

Most of the time = 86.1

Some of the time = 8.9

Very little = 0

Not at all = 0

TABLE II
WHAT QUALITIES ARE EXHIBITED BY GOOD TEACHERS?
 (Numbers Identified Represent Percentages)

Good classroom teachers:	Very Important	Important	Not Important
a. are humorous	37	61	2
b. are involved in extracurricular activities	31	63	6
c. are knowledgeable in each subject they teach	96	4	0
d. assign homework on a regular basis	18	54	28
e. communicate needs and progress of students with parents	83	17	0
f. concentrate on helping exceptional learners achieve their potential	82	18	0
g. enjoy their teaching	96	4	0
h. explain subjects clearly	98	2	0
i. express interest in students as individuals and not just as learners	87	13	0
j. monitor students work in the classroom	65.7	32.3	2
k. rely on the principal to take care of most of the discipline problems	5.0	28.3	66.7
l. return students' written work promptly	50	48	2
m. use a variety of discipline techniques	53.5	44.5	2
n. use a variety of instructional strategies	77	22	1
o. use media in instruction	48	47	5
p. use a variety of methods to evaluate students	52	46	2
q. use negative reinforcement often as a measure to correct student behavior	2	32	66
r. use positive reinforcement often as a measure to correct student behavior	67	31	2
s. work with all students to help them achieve their potential	1	89	10

TABLE III
BACKGROUND INFORMATION
 (Numbers Identified Represent Percentages)

-
1. Has anyone ever talked encouragingly with you about becoming a teacher?
- yes = 91.8
 No = 8.2
2. If your response was "yes," please indicate the relationship of the person(s) to you.
- | | | | |
|-------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|
| a. college teachers | 39.6 | e. friend | 42.6 |
| b. elementary principal | 7 | f. high school counselor | 9.9 |
| c. elementary teacher | 21 | g. high school principal | 5 |
| d. family member | 63.4 | h. high school teacher | 32.7 |
3. At what age did you become interested in teaching?
- | | | | |
|-----------------------|------|-----------------|------|
| a. 10 years and under | 11.9 | d. 15-18 years | 33.0 |
| b. 11-12 years | 1.5 | e. 19-22 years | 36.1 |
| c. 13-14 years | 8.2 | f. 23 and older | 9.3 |
4. What grade level do you think you would like to teach?
- | | |
|--------------------------|------|
| a. elementary school K-5 | 49 |
| b. middle school 6-8 | 12.5 |
| c. high school 9-12 | 38.5 |
5. After college graduation, I plan to:
- | | |
|--|------|
| a. begin full-time teaching | 50.5 |
| b. begin full-time teaching and enter graduate school on a part-time basis | 36.1 |
| c. enter graduate school full-time | 5.1 |
| d. seek full-time employment outside of teaching | 3.1 |
| e. other | 5.2 |
6. Sex
- | | |
|-----------|------|
| a. Female | 76.8 |
| b. Male | 23.2 |
7. Race
- | | | | |
|----------|---|-------------|----|
| a. Asian | 2 | c. Hispanic | 0 |
| b. Black | 2 | d. White | 96 |
8. Have any of your relatives (parents, grandparents, aunt, uncle) served as teachers?
- | | |
|--------|------|
| a. Yes | 64.3 |
| b. No | 35.7 |
-

TABLE IV
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
MALES AND FEMALES

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Friends would encourage	.0452	F > M
2. Would you encourage an interested brother to become a teacher?	.0252	M > F
3. Importance of returning student work promptly	.0004	F > M
4. Importance of using a variety of instructional strategies	.0196	F > M
5. Importance of using media in instruction	.0157	F > M
6. Importance of using variety of methods to evaluate	.0343	F > M
7. College teacher has talked encouragingly with individual about teaching	.0007	M > F
8. Elementary teacher has talked encouragingly with individual about teaching	.0268	F > M
9. Grade level you plan to teach	.0000	Males plan to teach higher grade levels

TABLE V
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS
CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF
GRADE LEVEL INDIVIDUALS PLAN TO TEACH

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Importance of communicating with parents	.0214	Elem. > H.S.
2. Importance of expressing interest in students	.0122	Elem. > H.S.
3. Importance of returning student work promptly	.0424	Elem. > H.S.
4. Importance of using a variety of instructional strategies	.0286	Elem. > H.S.
5. Importance of using media in instruction	.0105	Elem. > H.S.
6. College teacher has talked encouragingly with individual about teaching	.0003	H.S. > Elem.
7. Elementary teacher has talked encouragingly with individual about teaching	.0007	Elem. > M.G., H.S.
8. Sex	.0000	H.S. majors have larger numbers of males than middle school or elem. majors

TABLE VI
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS
CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF
WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE
RELATIVES THAT HAVE BEEN TEACHERS

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Job security seen as an encouraging factor	.0399	Rel. > No Rel.
2. High school teachers would encourage	.0436	Rel. > No Rel.
3. Family member has talked encouragingly with individual about teaching	.0005	Rel. > No Rel.

TABLE VII

SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS
CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF AGE
INDIVIDUAL BECAME INTERESTED IN TEACHING

(a = 10 and under, b = 11-12, c = 13-14, d = 15-18, e = 19-22, f = 23 and over)

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Contribution to humanity seen as an encouraging factor	.0143	a,d,f,e > c
2. Job security seen as an encouraging factor	.0251	a,e,d > f
3. College teachers would encourage	.0041	a,c,d,e,f > b
4. Elementary teacher has talked encouragingly with individual about teaching	.0271	e > a,f d > a,f

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